

**ROLES OF ELECTRONIC TEXTS IN
RESEARCH PROJECTS IN THE HUMANITIES**

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Certificate of authorship/originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree, except as fully acknowledged within the text.

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Посвећено успомени на моје родитеље,

Мирјану и Милорада Шуковића.



Dedicated to the memory of my parents,

Mirjana and Milorad Sukovic.

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Publications arising from the study

Journal articles

Sukovic, Suzana. 2008. Convergent flows: humanities scholars and their interactions with electronic texts. *Library Quarterly* 78 (3).

— — . 2008. Information discovery in ambiguous zones of research. *Library Trends* 57 (1).

— — . Forthcoming. To see what turns up: uncertainty in the research process. *Information Processing & Management* (Special issue 'Designing for Uncertainty in Information Seeking').

Peer-reviewed conference papers

Sukovic, Suzana. 2006. Electronic texts in the humanities: converging media, formats, practices and ideas. Paper presented at IR 7.0: Internet Convergences, presented by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), at Brisbane, 27 – 30 September. <http://conferences.aoir.org/index.php?cf=5>.

— — . 2007. Scholarly (r)evolution: roles of e-texts in the research process in the humanities. Paper presented at Digital Humanities 2007: The joint international conference of the Association for Computers and the Humanities, and the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing, 4 – 8 June, at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dh2007/dh2007.abstracts.pdf>.

Abstract

The focus of this thesis is interactions of scholars with electronic texts (e-texts). Although computer technology has become an increasingly prominent part of various practices, and textual sources have key roles in scholarship, particularly in research in the humanities, interactions of humanities researchers with electronic texts have been only marginally investigated. Scholars in the humanities use a wide range of primary materials, which are essential for their research, but the understanding of their interactions with these materials in electronic form is very limited. This study has explored roles of electronic text in research enquiry in literary and historical studies, and aimed to deepen the understanding of the nature of scholars' engagement with e-texts. The study has focused on the engagement of scholars in literary and historical studies with electronic texts used as primary materials. Researchers in these disciplines are known for their intense use of textual sources, particularly a wide variety of primary sources. A hermeneutical approach and qualitative methodology were used in the study involving interviews and other methods of data-gathering from sixteen academic researchers who discussed thirty research projects. The participants' perceptions of e-texts as fluid entities, which can include a variety of formats and media, underpinned their discussions of engagement with e-texts. The study results revealed a range of scholars' interactions with the e-texts used to investigate research topics and present results of their research projects. The study uncovered four types of uses of electronic texts: Supplementing, Locating, Exploring and Analysing text. The data analysis identified four functions of e-texts in projects: Support in finding documents and information, Aid in managing the research process, Aid in investigation of the topic, and Contribution to writing and presenting research results. Electronic texts played Support and Substantive roles in research projects. Support roles aid in providing the basis for research, and Substantive roles aid in exploring the topic and presenting research findings. The identified uses, functions and roles highlight the multifaceted contributions of electronic texts to all phases of the research process. A number of influences from electronic and research environments were identified as challenges and aids in working with electronic texts. The study findings

are related to considerations of text as information and to social aspects of information processes in academic research, which contribute to theoretical discussions in information studies. The thesis discusses implications of the study for the design of electronic information systems and for the support of research in the humanities. Insights into scholars' research processes and theoretical considerations indicate a number of areas for future investigation.